



Essential School Leadership with Keith Nix and Robyn Burlew

Lesson 5: School Culture (Part 1)

Outline:

Cultural Ideals

- The culture at Veritas feels a lot more like a garden than a factory.
- A recognition of Imago dei honors the reality that each student is made in the image of God.
- We don't want to just put the right things in the soil, we want everything around them to be conducive to the things that we are aiming for.
- Friendship is the school of virtue.

Practices that grow the culture at Veritas

- Long transitions and long lunches honor embodied students.
- Faculty friendships are lived out in front of students.
- Administration makes a point to communicate that they know and love the students.
- Teachers begin and dismiss class intentionally and ritually to welcome students meaningfully (no more bell system).

Expectations for students

- Expectations are laid out in a handbook.
- These are principles for students to live by and apply as they get older.
- Appeal to students with respect by asking them to consider language and gestures in light of biblical principles.

How does memory cultivate virtue?

- Quite a few teachers have adapted catechesis at the beginning of their classes.
- There is a catechism for middle school students to equip students with a "metaeducation" about their education.
- The students sing hymns together as an enculturating practice.
- Parents are key culture makers.

Normalizing conflict

- Peacemaking is encouraged.
- Healthy communication is addressed in a document called "Principles of Partnership".
 - We will sin against each other living in close proximity.
 - How are we going to deal with it?
 - Give them language to use and make yourself available.
 - It is normal, but it is not right (to sin against each other).



- Lower grade teachers lay foundations for children to learn to put others first and apologize.

How do you reinforce communication about standards that you want people to conform to?

- Twice a year Veritas University is held where classes reinforce touchpoints.
- Concerts, assemblies, and dinners are all opportunities to reinforce what the school is about.
- Weekly emails and letters home reinforce what the school is about.
- Teachers email parents to equip them for talk around the dinner table.
- Every parent conversation is an opportunity to affirm shared commitments.
- Keep appealing to parents about technology and sports culture.

What was done with grades, and how was that a culture changer? How have parents and students responded to change in grading?

- Lower school teachers have gone to narrative grading and feedback (no numerical grades).
- Students often see their worth as equivalent to their grades or scores on a test. We need practices that don't tempt them toward measuring themselves and competing grades.
- There is no honor roll.
- Students should love learning and doing the right thing.
- This is a hard change for teachers.
- People are really benefitting from narrative feedback.
- Doing homework to glorify God is a different mindset than doing it to get into a certain college.